

Political Advertising in 2018
Wesleyan Media Project
Release Version 1.0 (December 2020)

This collection provides detailed tracking data on when and where political ads aired during the 2018 elections. It covers all broadcast television stations in all media markets in the United States. Ads aired in U.S. Senate, U.S. House and gubernatorial races are also coded for their content.

DATABASES

The data collection comes in four different files (unlike 2010, *estimated* spending information is available for each ad within each file):

1. wmp-senate-2018: contains information on all ads aired in U.S. Senate races
2. wmp-house-2018: contains information on all ads aired in U.S. House races
3. wmp-gov-2018: contains information on all ads aired in gubernatorial races
4. wmp-downballot-2018: contains information on all ads aired in other races. Some state legislative ads in this file have content coding information. Typically, WMP only provides this for federal and gubernatorial ads, but in 2018, we conducted content coding on a subset of state legislative ads. The content variables will be blank for the majority of ads in this file.

CITATION

Publications based on this data collection should acknowledge this source by means of bibliographic citation. The bibliographic citation for this data collection is:

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SUPPORT

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DATA COLLECTION AND CODING

The source for the ad data is Kantar Media/CMAG. This commercial firm specializes in providing detailed, real-time tracking information to corporate and political clients. These tracking data represent the most comprehensive and systematic collection on the content and targeting of political advertisements. The data include two types of information. First, frequency information tells when and where ads aired. It contains precise and detailed information on the date, time, market, station, and television show of each airing. Second, the data provide information about each ad's content in the form of a video file for each unique creative or individual ad.

CMAG gathers such data by using a market-based tracking system, deploying "Ad Detectors" in each media market in the U.S. In addition to all local advertising activity, these detectors track advertisements on the major national networks, as well as national cable networks. The system's software recognizes the electronic seams between programming and advertising and identifies the

“digital fingerprints” of specific advertisements. When the system does not recognize the fingerprints of a particular spot, the advertisement is captured and downloaded. Thereafter, the system automatically recognizes and logs that particular commercial wherever and whenever it airs. Studies that examine advertisers’ “buy sheets” obtained from television stations and compare them with this CMAG data find that the company’s system is highly reliable in tracking the universe of ads aired.

After receiving the data from CMAG, the Wesleyan Media Project processes and codes the ad tracking data from all media markets in the United States. In this process, using videos of ads captured by CMAG, project staff first research the entity responsible for airing each political spot, distinguishing between those paid for by candidates, parties, and interest groups. Finally, the Wesleyan Media Project codes the content of each ad on an extensive battery of questions using a web-based content analysis platform.

A NOTE ABOUT THE DATA

The Wesleyan Media Project is providing these data as a courtesy to the academic community, and not as a polished commercial product. The nominal fee you pay is for administrative expenses. We've worked hard to clean the data that we've coded, but as with all datasets this large, there may be some errors that remain. For CMAG variables marked with an asterisk below, WMP corrects errors as we find them, but we don't *systematically* review/clean these variables. All other CMAG variables are not cleaned at all by WMP. We do not have information on how CMAG variables are collected/coded.

We have provided reliability statistics at the end of this document for your reference. Reliability statistics can be misleading when almost all observations take on the same value, such as when a characteristic is absent in almost all ads. We thus urge users of the data to use caution when interpreting reliability statistics under these circumstances.

Due to the legacy of many of the variables in the WiscAds/WMP time series and the desire of many to do their own additional coding, we have provided many variables in the public release that have reliability statistics that do not meet traditionally acceptable levels. Therefore, we also urge users to read the material carefully and use caution when using variables below traditional thresholds.

Depending on resource availability, we do occasionally update the data files to correct errors and issues brought to our attention by users. If you notice issues with the data, feel free to share the information with us at mediaproject@wesleyan.edu.

VARIABLES

Provided by CMAG

For CMAG variables marked with an asterisk, WMP corrects errors as we find them, but we don't systematically review/clean them. All other CMAG variables are not cleaned at all by WMP.

creative: name of specific advertisement

market: media market where ad aired

dma: media market ID

l: length of ad in seconds

station: name of television station

affiliate: name of television affiliate

airdate: date on which ad aired

airtime: time at which ad aired

media: television medium

daypart: time of day during which ad aired

program: television program during which ad aired

programtype: type of television program during which ad aired

category*: category of race

categorystate*: state in which the race took place, identified by CMAG

election:

Primary

General

N/A

issue: key issues discussed: identified by CMAG

level*: level of race

race*: type of race

tonemag: tone of ad (different from WMP's AD_TONE variable)

Positive

Negative

Contrast

adtypecmag*:

Ballot Measure

Candidate

Candidate & Party

Issue-Election

Party

Private Citizen

sponsorcmag: ad sponsor

district*: congressional district (for House races)

party*: party of favored candidate/sponsor

est_cost: estimated cost of ad airing

WMP Variables

state: Dominant state associated with the media market

sponsor:

- 1 Candidate
- 2 Party
- 3 Coordinated between a candidate and party
- 4 Interest Group/other

sponsor_name: name of group or party sponsoring the ad

issue_type1 Does the ad ask the viewer to contact a legislator about an issue?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

issue_type2 If suggests contacting legislator, does ad promote or attack legislator?

- 1 Ad promotes or attacks a legislator
- 2 Tone unclear, does not attack or promote a legislator

cand: Is the favored candidate shown / mentioned in the ad?

- 0 Favored candidate not mentioned/not ascertainable
- 1 Favored candidate is ascertainable (list name in cand_id variable)
- 2 Multiple favored candidates

cand_id: Name of the favored candidate

cand_fec: FEC ID of favored candidate

tgt: Is a targeted candidate shown / mentioned in the ad?

- 0 No targeted candidate in ad
- 1 Targeted candidate is ascertainable (list name in tgt_id variable)
- 2 Multiple targeted candidates

tgt_id: Name of the targeted candidate

tgt_fec: FEC ID of targeted candidate

gender_fav Gender of the favored candidate

gender_tar Gender of the targeted candidate

mag_wrd: Does the ad mention any of the following *specific* words or phrases: vote for, elect, support, cast your ballot, [Smith] for Congress, vote against, defeat, or reject?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes
- 2 Yes, But only in the Paid for By (PFB) tag
- 97 No, but coder could not read the PFB, so could be mentioned there

approve: Where does the candidate's oral approval of the spot appear?

- 0 No Oral Statement of Approval/Authorization
- 1 Beginning of the Spot
- 2 Middle of the Spot
- 3 End of the Spot

vid: Does the candidate physically appear on screen and speak to the audience during oral approval?

- 0 No, Authorization Stated in Voiceover
- 1 Yes

Excluding the "oral approval," is the...

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

f_mention: Favored candidate mentioned by name in the ad?

f_picture: Favored candidate pictured in the ad?

f_narrate: Favored candidate narrating the ad?

f_camera: Favored candidate talking directly into camera in the ad?

o_mention: Opposing candidate mentioned by name in the ad?

o_picture: Opposing candidate pictured in the ad?

voice: Does the ad have a voiceover announcer, someone who speaks but is not pictured and is not the candidate?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes, a female
- 2 Yes, a male
- 3 Yes, both female and male voiceover

ad_tone: In your judgment, is the primary purpose of the ad to promote a specific candidate, attack a candidate, or contrast the candidates?

- 1 Contrast
- 2 Promote
- 3 Attack

cnt_fin: If the ad is a contrast ad, does it finish by promoting a candidate or attacking a candidate?

- 1 Finishes by Promoting
- 2 Finishes by Attacking

prty_mn: Does the ad mention the party label of the favored candidate or the opponent?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes, Favored Candidate's Party
- 2 Yes, Opposing Candidate's Party
- 3 Yes, Both Candidates' Parties
- 4 Yes, Favored Candidate's Party but Only in Paid For By (PFB) line

per_ply: In your judgment, is the primary focus of the ad personal characteristics of either candidate or policy matters?

- 0 Neither
- 1 Personal Characteristics
- 2 Policy Matters
- 3 Both Personal Characteristics and Policy Matters

Are any of the following mentioned or pictured in the ad?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes, in a way to show approval or support
- 2 Yes, in a way to show disapproval or opposition
- 3 Yes, unclear whether in support or opposition

prsmnt: Is Donald Trump mentioned or pictured in the ad?

gbush: Is George W. Bush mentioned or pictured in the ad?

hclinton: Is Hillary Clinton mentioned or pictured in the ad?

bclinton: Is Bill Clinton mentioned or pictured in the ad?

mueller: Is Robert Mueller mentioned or pictured in the ad?

bobama: Is Barack Obama mentioned or pictured in the ad?

reagan: Is Ronald Reagan mentioned or pictured in the ad?

gophse: Is John Boehner mentioned or pictured in the ad?

demhse: Is Nancy Pelosi mentioned or pictured in the ad?

gopsen: Is Mitch McConnell mentioned or pictured in the ad?

demsen: Is Harry Reid mentioned or pictured in the ad?

congmt: Is Congress mentioned or pictured in the ad?

washmt: Is Washington (DC) mentioned or pictured in the ad?

Does the ad cite any of the following sources to bolster various claims?

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

cite4: Does the ad cite an opponent's ad to bolster various claims?

cite5: Does the ad cite legislation to bolster various claims?

cite6: Does the ad cite any media source (website, newspaper, etc.)?

Please assess the intent of the ad maker (not your own personal reaction) below. Does the ad make an appeal to the following emotions? *In 2018, coders were only asked to identify the presence or absence of these emotions. Previous years coding had a scale of "some appeal" or "strong appeal"*

- 0 No
- 1 Yes

fear: Does the ad make an appeal to fear?

enthusiasm: Does the ad make an appeal to fear?

anger: Does the ad make an appeal to fear?

pride: Does the ad make an appeal to fear?

humor: Does the ad make an appeal to fear?

sadness: Does the ad make an appeal to fear?

music0: There is no music in the ad

- 0 There IS music in the ad
- 1 There is NO MUSIC in the ad

If music is played during the ad, how would it best be described?

0 No

1 Yes

music1: Ominous/tense music

music2: Uplifting music

music3: Sad or sorrowful music

music90: Another type of music

music90_txt: Description of other type of music

Are any of these words/phrases *specifically* mentioned in the ad?

0 No

1 Yes

mention1: Tea Party

mention3: Hope

mention33: God/Faith

mention4: Change

mention5: Experience

mention6: Liberal

mention7: Conservative

mention8: Special Interests

mention15: Main Street

mention16: Wall Street

mention17: Big Government

mentionwc: Working Class

mentionmc: Middle Class

mentionuc: Upper Class / Rich / Wealthy

mention18: Obamacare

mention19: Planned Parenthood

mention21: Dark Money

mention23: Millionaire(s) / Billionaire(s)

mentioncomm: Community

mentionneigh: Neighborhood

mentiontogeth: Together

mention26: Fake News

mention27: Impeach Trump

mention32: Trumpcare

Issue mentions: Are any of the following issues mentioned in this ad?

0 No

1 Yes

Economic Policy

issue10: Taxes

issue24: Tax Reform

issue11: Deficit/Budget/Debt

issue12: Government Spending

issue13: Recession/Economic Stimulus

issue14: Minimum Wage

issue15: Farming

issue16: Business
issue17: Union
issue18: Employment/Jobs
issue19: Poverty
issue20: Trade/Globalization
issue21: Housing/Sub-prime Mortgages
issue22: Economy (generic reference)
issue23: Economic disparity/income inequality

Social Issues

issue30: Abortion
issue31: Homosexuality/Gay & Lesbian Rights
issue101: Gender Discrimination (not LGBTQ-related)
issue32: Moral/Family/Religious Values
issue33: Tobacco
issue34: Affirmative Action
issue35: Gambling
issue36: Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia
issue37: Gun Control
gunpic: Gen Pictured in Ad
issue38: Civil Liberties/Privacy
issue39: Civil Rights / Racial Discrimination
issue102: Seniors (not Medicare)
issue107: #metoo / #timesup

Law and Order

issue40: Crime
issue41: Narcotics/Illegal Drugs
issue42: Capital Punishment
issue43: Supreme Court/Judiciary
issue44: Marijuana
issue45: Incarceration / Sentencing
issue108: Parkland / Stoneman Douglas High School
issue200: Domestic Violence / Sexual Assault / Harassment
issue212: Police Brutality / Racial Violence

Social Welfare Issues

issue50: Education/Schools
issue51: Lottery for Education
issue52: Child Care
issue53: Health Care (not prescription drugs)
issue54: Prescription Drugs
issue55: Medicare
issue56: Social Security
issue57: Welfare
issue58: Women's Health
issue59: Affordable Care Act / Obamacare / Health Care Law / etc.
issue105: 2017 Efforts at Health Reform / AHCA / Trumpcare
issue106: Opioids / Rx Drug Abuse

issue210: Substance Use Disorder

Foreign/Defense Policy

issue60: Military (generic reference)
issue61: Foreign Policy (generic reference)
issue62: Veterans
issue63: Foreign Aid
issue64: Nuclear Proliferation
issue65: China
issue66: Middle East
issue67: Afghanistan/War in Afghanistan
issue68: September, 11th
issue69: Terror/Terrorism/Terrorist
issue70: Iraq/War in Iraq
issue71: Israel
issue72: Iran
issue73: ISIL / ISIS
issue74: Syria
issue75: Russia / Putin
issue76: North Korea / Jim Jong Un

Environment/Energy

issue80: Environment (generic reference)
issue82: Global Warming
issue83: Energy Policy
issue84: Keystone XL Pipeline

Other

issue90: Campaign Finance Reform
issue91: Government Ethics/Scandal
issue92: Corporate Fraud
issue93: Term Limits
issue94: Pledge of Allegiance (restrictions on)
issue95: Immigration
issue109: DACA / Dreamers
issue96: Local Issues
issue97: Other
issue97_txt: Description of other issue mentioned
issue98: Government Regulations
issue99: Government Shutdown
issue103: Emergency Preparedness / Response
issue104: Transportation / Infrastructure

spanish: Spanish-language ad

1 Yes

vidfile: Expected filename of corresponding .wmv video (if a file exists). Filename generated by WMP based on creative name. Actual filenames may vary (they were generated by CMAG).

codingstatus: Was the ad coded?

- 1 Ad was fully coded
- 2 Ad was partially coded. Part of the ad was cut off or video/audio quality was very poor, but some variables were able to be coded
- 3 Ad could not be coded (video error)
- 99 Not part of coding set – not coded

Ad aired in the race

- 1 Yes

gov: Ad aired in gubernatorial race

house: Ad aired in House race

senate: Ad aired in Senate race

Reliability Statistics for WMP Coding Variables

See below for a table showing various coding reliability statistics. Please read “**A note about the data**” on Page 2 for important information about this section.

% agreement – Indicates the percentage of time the raters assigned the same value for a given ad.

Kappa - We computed kappa statistics for all nominal variables. For ordinal variables we computed weighted kappas, which are indicated with an asterisk in the Kappa column of the table.

Krippendorff’s alpha – Krippendorff’s alpha statistics were computed for all variables, though they were run in two batches, depending on the variable type (ordinal vs. nominal).

Avg freq. in ICR set – These values indicate the average instances of a non-zero code in our ICR set. Ads were coded in two different systems, so the total number of ads in the ICR set depends on the system. System 1 had 1,654 ads in the ICR set. System 2 had 818 ads in the ICR set.

Variable	label	% Agreement	Kappa (*weighted kappa)	Krippendorff's alpha	Avg freq. in ICR set	System
issue_type1	Does the ad ask the viewer to contact a legislator about an issue?	92%	0.845	0.842	1648	1
issue_type2	If suggests contacting legislator, does ad promote or attack legislator?	99%	0.847	0.847	123	1
cand	Favored Candidate	89%	0.740	0.740	683	2
tgt	Targeted Candidate	93%	0.787	0.782	490	2
gender_fav	Gender of favored candidate	90%	0.857	0.855	1627	1
gender_tar	Gender of targeted candidate	90%	0.862	0.860	1627	1
mag_wrd	Magic Words	88%	0.763	0.760	819	2
approve	Where does the candidate's oral approval of the spot appear?	93%	0.825*	0.826	541	2
vid	Candidate appear on screen during approval	95%	0.816	0.813	370	2
f_mention	Is fav cand (matrix) Mentioned by name in the ad	94%	0.826	0.826	567	2
f_picture	Is fav cand (matrix) Pictured in the ad	93%	0.797	0.797	545	2
f_narrate	Is fav cand (matrix) Narrating the ad	96%	0.773	0.773	227	2
f_camera	Is fav cand (matrix) Talking directly into the camera	97%	0.822	0.822	251	2
o_mention	Is tar cand (matrix) Mentioned by name in the ad	96%	0.866	0.860	403	2
o_picture	Is tar cand (matrix) Pictured in the ad	96%	0.852	0.845	342	2
voice	Does the ad have a voiceover announcer?	91%	0.824	0.820	818	2
ad_tone	Is primary purpose of ad to promote a specific candidate, attack a candidate, or contrast the candidates?	88%	0.840	0.837	1627	1
cnt_fin	If ad is contrast, does it finish by promoting or attacking	94%	0.644	0.644	227	2
prty_mn	Party labels of candidate or opponent	89%	0.786	0.782	816	2
per_ply	Is the primary focus of the ad personal characteristics of either candidate or policy matters?	79%	0.779*	0.786	1627	1
prsmnt	Donald Trump mention	91%	0.844	0.842	291	1
gbush	George Bush mention	92%	0.828	0.824	3	1
hclinton	Hillary Clinton mention	92%	0.829	0.825	34	1
bclinton	Bill Clinton mention	92%	0.828	0.824	1	1

Variable	label	% Agreement	Kappa (*weighted kappa)	Krippendorff's alpha	Avg freq. in ICR set	System
issue67	Afghanistan/War in Afghanistan	100%	0.705	0.705	8	2
issue68	September 11th	100%	0.460	0.460	8	2
issue69	Terror/Terrorism/Terrorist	100%	0.739	0.739	15	2
issue70	Iraq/War in Iraq	100%	0.923	0.923	13	2
issue71	Israel	100%	0	1	0	2
issue72	Iran	100%	1	1	4	2
issue73	ISIL/ISIS	100%	1	1	2	2
issue74	Syria	100%	0	0	1	2
issue75	Russia / Putin	100%	0.599	0.599	3	1
issue76	North Korea / Kim Jong Un	100%	0.399	0.400	2	1
issue80	Environment (generic reference)	99%	0.526	0.526	23	2
issue82	Climate Change / Global Warming	100%	0.857	0.857	4	2
issue83	Energy Policy	99%	0.592	0.635	23	2
issue84	Keystone XL Pipeline	100%	0	0	2	2
issue204	Water Rights					2
issue205	Pollution					2
issue90	Campaign Finance Reform	97%	0.524	0.524	69	2
issue91	Government Ethics/Scandal	97%	0.490	0.490	67	2
issue92	Corporate Fraud	99%	0.313	0.313	13	2
issue93	Term Limits	100%	0.726	0.726	9	2
issue94	Pledge of Allegiance (restrictions on)	100%	0	1	0	2
issue95	Immigration	98%	0.894	0.884	221	1
issue109	DACA / Dreamers	100%	0.888	0.888	19	1
issue96	Local Issues	99%	0.184	0.184	21	2
issue97	Other_issue	99%	0.050	0.051	11	2
issue98	Government Regulations	99%	0.396	0.396	16	2
issue99	Government Shutdown	100%	0	0	0	2
issue103	Emergency Preparedness/Response	100%	0.587	0.587	7	2
issue104	Transportation/Infrastructure	99%	0.764	0.764	31	2